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Down With Everybody:

THE DANGEROUS extremes to which supposedly thoughtful Americans can be led in zealous efforts to combat communism have seldom been brought out more forcefully than in a semi-secret group known as the John Birch Society.

Named for a fundamentalist preacher slain by Chinese guerrillas in World War II, this organization was formed in 1957 by Robert Welch, a Boston candymaker who gave up confectioneering for pamphleteering. The society he runs with iron discipline, brooking no internal disagreement with his own views, reportedly has what it calls cells set up now in 37 states. Each is intent on pushing the Welch technique for overcoming the Communist menace, which the organization contends is strongly entrenched nearly everywhere—in top government circles, in our churches, schools, business, finance, labor unions. You name it, in other words, and it's Red-infested.

A few of Mr. Welch's beliefs should suffice to illustrate the peculiar mentality of the John Birchers. He has written, for example, that democracy is a deceptive phrase—"a weapon of demagoguery and a perennial fraud;" that former President Eisenhower and his brother, Milton, are dedicated agents of the Communist conspiracy; that CIA Director Allen Dulles is "the most protected and untouchable supporter of communism, next to Eisenhower himself, in Washington;" that Dag Hammarskjöld is one of the most contemptible agents of the Kremlin ever to be supported by American taxpayers; that our foreign aid programs are really schemes of the Communists to bankrupt our economy, and ad nauseum.

There is no denying that there are dangers posed by the ruthless designs of communism. But as the tragic consequences of the McCarthy era show so plainly, there is also great danger in any organization that goes about imposing its special brand of superpatriotism in the manner of the John Birch Society.

It is one thing to fight demagoguery. It is another to fight one form of despotism with another form of despotism that is equally despicable. For all of the group's penchant for operating undercover, the nation is better off for having now got a peek at the society whose philosophies, goals, and techniques are as un-American as those it opposes.